Raymond A. Barnard, JRTC

Preparation for Force Projection: The Intermediate Staging Base

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A C-130 lands on a dusty flight landing strip at 0200 in the Republic of Cortina. The last howitzer section of a six-gun battery quickly deplanes and joins the other guns that have assembled near the flight apron. Minutes later, all six howitzers are called forward to a firing position hastily selected by the advance party.

Confusion ensues in the firing position. The gunnery sergeant arrives without a declinated aiming circle, and the survey party has had to land at a different location due to aircraft maintenance problems. No illumination projectiles arrive because the containerized delivery system drop was delayed, and all the variable time fuzes are in the Field Artillery (FA) battalion trains, not yet in country. The fire direction center (FDC) lacks maneuver graphics for the search and attack mission, and the Q-36 Firefinder radar is unable to communicate digitally with the FDC because the wrong variables are loaded in its single-channel ground and airborne radio system (SINCGARS) radios. Overwhelmed, the battery commander calls the battalion S3 and reports, "Alpha Battery is out of action."

Observer/controllers (O/Cs) at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), Fort Polk, Louisiana, routinely see deployments similar to the one just described. Most would agree that serious execution flaws could be prevented on D-Day if the deploying unit had focused on actions in the intermediate staging base (ISB).

No training center in the Army focuses on contingency operations more than the JRTC. Each month, a brigade task force of four or five battalions of infantry, artillery, aviation and combat support deploys from home station to the imaginary island of Aragon (JRTC) at the request of the Republic of Cortina. The brigade arrives at an ISB approximately four days before D-Day (see Figure 1). Here, it must marshal its attachments, including special operations forces (SOF), a mechanized company team, an Air Force tactical airlift liaison officer (TALO), a combat support hospital, an air and naval gunfire liaison company (ANGLICO) platoon and, frequently, an allied maneuver company.

The division order is issued to the brigade in the ISB, and the planning process begins immediately. Under time constraints, the brigade commander and his staff must plan, prepare and execute a complex operation that culminates in combat operations in an extremely hostile operating environment.

Logically, brigades and battalions must develop standing operating procedures (SOPs) for actions in an ISB. Observations at the JRTC indicate that both heavy and light artillery units must be able to "lash up" a joint and combined fire support plan on short notice. The actions taken by the fire support coordinator (FSCOORD) and his staff in the ISB usually spell the difference between success and failure on the battlefield.

This article discusses the planning, preparation and execution phases that FA battalions deploying to an ISB must master. The key phrase Redlegs must remember for such contingency operations is, "Get Ready—Get Set—Go!"

Get Ready—The Planning Stage

In a mature theater where a joint task force (JTF) has been established, it's common for a brigade commander to receive the division operations order immediately upon arrival in the ISB. At the JRTC, the brigade task force usually receives the order at D-4—just 96 hours before execution. Then the brigade must publish and brief its order about 24 hours later to maximize the time for subordinate battalions and companies to plan and rehearse appropriately. Several plans need to be developed concurrently in the ISB.

• **Fire Support Plan.** The FSCOORD and the brigade fire support officer (FSO) develop the fire support plan from the top down. Redlegs always work diligently on this plan, developing the target selection standards (TSS), attack guidance matrix (AGM) and the fire support execution matrix (FSEM) to the standards of *FM 6-20-50 Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Fire Support for Brigade Operations (Light)*. However, the allocation of resources, the scheme of fires for the insertion and coordination with other firing units in country remain as challenges for FSOs at all levels.

In the ISB, coordination is difficult. JTF, division artillery, cavalry regiments, ANGLICO, Special Forces A Teams and host nation liaison officers must all provide input to the final fire support plan to be executed at H-Hour.

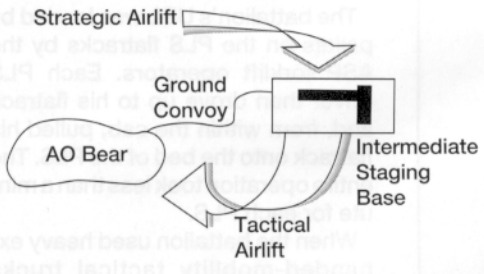

Figure 1: A Typical Deployment with an ISB. Most strategic airlift terminates in the ISB. Units then reconfigure their equipment from strategic to combat loads and convoy or go by helicopter into the area of operations—in this case, AO Bear.

	D-1	D-Day	D+1	D+2	D+3	D+4
Maneuver	JI/Deploy →	Deploy/Establish Lodgment →		Combat Operations/Movement-to-Contact		
FA Battalion	JI/Deploy →	Occupy Initial Firing Positions →		Support Movement-to-Contact		
	Supplies Received/Issued	Supplies Received/Issued	Supplies Received/Issued	Supplies Received/Issued	Supplies Received/Issued	Supplies Received/Issued
Class I	1800/1800	0/0	3600/0	1800/2700	1800/0	0/0
Class III	Deploy w/UBL					
Package		0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
DF2		0/0	0/250	250/0	0/175	175/50
MOGAS		0/0	0/75	75/0	0/55	55/90
Class II/IV						
Plywood	768/768	0/0	0/0	0/0	75/0	0/75
4x4	120/120	0/0	0/0	0/0	60/0	0/60
Pickets	75/75	0/0	0/0	0/0	100/0	0/100
Class V	(UBL)					
HE	512/512	0/0	288/0	0/288	432/0	1284/720
ICM	602/602	0/0	0/0	0/0	144/0	0/0
WP	166/166	0/0	48/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
ILL	100/100	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
HC	118/118	0/0	48/0	0/0	0/0	144/0
HEPT	68/68	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
APERS	58/58	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
HE-CHG 8	240/240	0/0	0/0	0/0	144/0	0/44
Small Arms						
5.56	12000/12000	0/0	2200/0	0/2200	3000/0	0/3000
7.62	3500/3500	0/0	1000/0	0/1000	1500/0	0/1500

Legend:

DF2 = Diesel Fuel
MOGAS = Motor Gasoline
HE = High Explosive
ICM = Improved Conventional Munition
WP = White Phosphorous
ILL = Illumination
HEPT = High-Explosive Plastic-Tracer
APERS = Antipersonnel
Chg 8 = Charge 8
UBL = Unit Basic Load

Figure 2: Sample FA Battalion CSS Execution Matrix for Resupply. The "Received" column is the quantity received by battalion trains via aerial delivery. The "Issued" column is the quantity issued by battalion trains to the firing batteries.

• **Movement Plan.** Most strategic airlift terminates in the ISB. There units reconfigure their equipment from strategic loads to tactical loads and board helicopters or Air Force aircraft for the final insertion into the area of operations (AO). Heavy equipment, such as tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles (BFVs) and engineer assets, will probably conduct a ground convoy from a C5-capable airstrip into the AO, necessitating a link-up plan. In support of the brigade commander's scheme of maneuver, the movement plan becomes a two-part exercise.

The first step in developing the movement plan is the prioritized vehicle list (PVL). Two PVLs must be developed: one for tactical air movement and one for tactical ground convoy.

The second step is the development of the brigade's air-ground movement schedule prepared by the brigade movement planner based on input from the FA battalion S3. Integration of all the artillery battalion assets into the movement plan in the proper sequence to support the commander's scheme of maneuver must occur. Convoys and tactical air movement chalks must be configured in accordance with the task organization. The FA battalion must plan the movement of command and control assets, combat service support (CSS) assets, firing batteries, the Q-36 radar and survey.

At the JRTC, the deployment of the Q-36 radar, a firing element and a jump tactical operations center (TOC) early in the brigade's insertion continues to be a successful technique. The radar and the firing element provide coverage for the brigade during the expansion of the lodgment area or airhead. Force protection, route reconnaissance and countermine operations must be integrated into the movement plan. Ammunition and CSS assets necessary to sustain the FA battalion for the first three to four days also must deploy early in the airflow.

• **Logistics Plan.** Integrating logistics and tactical planning at the battalion level continues to present a significant challenge to units during rotations at the JRTC. Too often, commanders and operations planners develop the scheme of maneuver and concept for fires separately and then ask the logisticians to devise a logistics scheme to support the overall plan. Obviously, logistics plans and operations plans must be developed concurrently.

If this doesn't occur, then CSS actions may cause lapses in support and combat power will be plagued with peaks and valleys rather than being sustained. The battalion logisticians must identify available resources (bearing in mind that Cortina is remote), haul capabilities, stocks of supplies that will deploy with the unit and consumption rates.

The artillery battalion's logistics support hinges on the brigade's aerial resupply plan. The aerial resupply plan will be the lifeline for its subordinate battalions for several days or weeks. In an austere theater, virtually 100 percent of logistics sup-

port will arrive via air lines of communication.

The FA battalion S4 must project requirements for resupply based on the scheme of fires. (See the sample FA battalion CSS execution matrix in Figure 2 on Page 15.) Ammunition, construction material, food and water all compete with each other for priority of airlift.

Successful units prepare a "menu" of necessary supplies, rigging 463L pallets or A22 containers with them before leaving the ISB. Then as C130s or helicopters become available, the pre-rigged loads are delivered to drop zones or landing strips according to a pre-arranged schedule. Minor adjustments can be made by substituting different items on the menu.

Of course, a landing zone recovery plan with adequate security is mandatory. The Redleg support platoon, with help from the forward support battalion, must recover the loads off the drop zone before they are captured by the enemy.

• **Casualty Evacuation Plan.** Units often deploy with operations plans and orders that contain voluminous health service support annexes. However, rarely do all the players involved really understand how medical evacuation will occur on the battlefield and what Level III health care facilities are available in country. Clearly a coordinated effort is necessary to plan, develop, war-game and rehearse an evacuation plan for mass casualties.

All Redleg leaders must know how and when to evacuate their wounded once they arrive in country. Key leaders must know the locations of casualty collection points, ambulance exchange points and battalion aid stations.

Artillery batteries must evacuate casualties by ground transport whenever possible, saving aeromedical evacuation for litter-urgent patients. Five-ton trucks or heavy expanded-mobility tactical trucks (HEMTTs), when properly configured, are ideal platforms for back hauling wounded in action (WIA) and properly treated litter-urgent casualties from casualty collection points to the brigade support area (BSA).

Get Set— The Preparation Stage

Once the brigade order is briefed, the FA battalion S3 immediately prepares a time line of events to accomplish before departing the ISB. By D-3, the FA battalion and its attachments are working non-stop reconfiguring vehicle loads and preparing all equipment for the tactical insertion. Time is of the essence as key leaders conduct backward planning from the objective to the flight strip. The one-third for planning and two-thirds for implementation rule clearly applies at all echelons.

First, the FSCOORD, S3, S2 and the targeting officer assist the brigade FSO by participating in the brigade targeting meeting. Under the leadership of the brigade executive officer, this meeting has a clear agenda and follows the decide-detect-deliver methodology described in *FM 6-20-10 Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for the Targeting Process.*

Targeting meetings focus the entire combat power of the brigade (lethal and non-lethal) on high-payoff targets that will defeat the enemy and support the brigade commander's scheme of maneuver. The targets approved must be specific, achievable and well known throughout the brigade. Further, each target must have a purpose within the scheme of maneuver.

At the conclusion of the targeting meeting, the brigade S3 publishes a fragmentary order (FRAGO) delineating the targeting responsibilities of staff sections and subordinate units for the next 24 to 36 hours.

Second, rehearsals take place at all echelons in the ISB. The brigade commander usually conducts a combined arms rehearsal, often beginning with a large walk-on terrain kit. Each FSO must walk on the terrain kit with his maneuver commander and describe exactly where the targets are and who will shoot them. Similarly, each mortar platoon leader and battery commander should illustrate the scheme of fire support and the movement of each weapon system. The ranking artilleryman for each phase of the insertion must be identified at the combined arms rehearsal so maneuver commanders will know who to call to resolve any conflicts with fire support.

If possible, fire supporters should conduct a separate systems rehearsal immediately following (or prior to) the combined rehearsal. The intricate details of naval gunfire, close air support (CAS), suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) and pre-assault fires are worked out at the fire support rehearsal.

Third, Redleg NCOs must conduct troop-leading procedures. These procedures must include a thorough pre-combat inspection. Weapons systems and vehicles must be combat loaded to rigorous standards before the initial insertion. Basic battle drills, such as the verification of weapons zero, counterambush techniques and layout of section equipment, will yield great benefits on the battlefield. Ammunition, both main gun and small arms, must be carefully loaded, and troops must be briefed in detail on the enemy situation and the rules of engagement (ROE). Successful units often develop simple vignettes to drill soldiers as they prepare to enforce the ROE. Load plans are carefully checked and the means of entry—heavy drop parachute, helicopter or C130 aircraft—is rehearsed at the small-unit level.

Fourth, the joint inspection (JI) takes place for those units that will land in the AO. Known as the "first battle of the JRTC," the JI is a meticulous, time-consuming process where rolling stock and personnel are inspected by a joint Army/Air Force team of experts who certify all aircraft loads for safe loading and air operations. Great emphasis is placed on proper load plans, tie-down procedures and loading and handling of hazardous materials, including all flammables and ammunition.

Heavy attachments to light Army units frequently experience difficulty with the JI process, resulting in long lines of frustrated chalks. Each improperly rigged vehicle must be reloaded, reweighed and reinspected before it can be rolled aboard aircraft. During the JI, loading teams will manifest and weigh all personnel and equipment before loading the aircraft. Key leaders must be present at all stations of the JI process so the unit can maintain its time line.

Last, a communications exercise of some sort is of great importance before wheels up. Each FM and digital radio operator in the FA battalion should enter his appropriate radio net at some time over a two- or three-day period in the ISB, validating the unit's communications capability. If possible, the battalion also should conduct a communications rehearsal with the brigade and the maneuver battalion FSOs before the aircraft are loaded.

In a matter of hours after the aircraft take off, the brigade will be split between the ISB and the objective area, totally dependent on radio communications to orchestrate the insertion, pre-assault fires, SEAD programs and close supporting fires in the vicinity of the flight landing strip. A simple communications rehearsal in the ISB often spells the difference between success and failure.

Redleg staff officers plan for deployment into the area of operations at the JRTC.

Go—The Execution Stage

A successful deployment from the ISB into the AO requires decentralized execution. Battery commanders and their NCOs are the keys to success.

Command and control during the insertion is a real challenge. At the JRTC, the ISB and the AO are 50 miles apart. FA battalions must deploy a command post (CP) of some sort into the AO early. A jump TOC that can secure and sustain itself for up to 48 hours is probably the best way to control the deployment.

The FA battalion S3 is the logical choice to go forward and execute the movement plan. The artillery battalion executive officer is the right person to "push" the battalion out of the ISB. A retransmission capability between the ISB and the AO completes the communications link if satellite communications (SATCOM) or high-frequency (HF) assets are unavailable.

The first element into the AO is usually the brigade's assault force. The assault force deploys with enough security and communications assets to seize the initial lodgment and communicate the conditions of the routes in. The assault force must be prepared to sustain itself in a hostile environment for up to 48 hours—at least until the brigade TOC arrives. Engineers and Redlegs attached to the assault force can often begin the reconnaissance for and preparation of firing positions, depending on the enemy situation.

The next step is the expansion of the lodgment by maneuver forces and the air follow-on of combat support assets, including FA and mortars. Clearing and protecting the flight landing strip—from which all support will flow—becomes a priority mission. Firing batteries and Firefinder radars arrive in the lodgment early in the airflow.

Firing positions are established with force protection as the most important consideration. FA battery and Q-36 radar positions require extensive engineer support for survivability. Additionally, a 6400-mil capability is important to provide coverage for the entire brigade zone.

Frequently, two days pass before all elements of the fire support system arrive on the battlefield ready to provide support to the brigade commander through the coordinated efforts of the FSCOORD and his staff. The complex process of deploying an FA battalion from home station to the ISB pales in comparison to the planning and preparation that takes place in the ISB before the tactical insertion. One lesson is clear: the 96 hours a unit spends in the ISB is crucial for success in Cortina.

Observations on Power Projection

Rotations during the past 18 months at the JRTC have clearly established that the actions in the ISB set the tone for the entire training exercise. Units that can plan, prepare and execute violently usually achieve early success.

The following training observations are presented to assist units as they plan for operations in an ISB. We are confident that the observations apply in combat operations as well.

- Centralized planning in the ISB and decentralized execution in the AO will yield the best chances for success.
- An 80 percent plan is good enough. Conduct a detailed war game in the ISB and publish the FA support plan (FASP). The soldiers need more time than the planners to prepare for the insertion.
- Rehearse the movement plan as well as the operations plan—you can't win if you can't get into the AO.
- Conduct a valid communications exercise (COMMEX) in the ISB, even if it competes with the JI process.
- Recognize early on that fire support will be austere on D-Day. Naval gunfire, mortars and 105-mm howitzer platoons offer fast, all-weather fire support up front.
- The JI is the "first battle"—do it right the first time and you'll free up lots of time leaders can use for rehearsals and troop-leading procedures.
- The aerial resupply plan is your lifeline for contingency operations. Construct a menu of commodity items, such as ammunition, barrier materials and food and water. Then select from the menu and recover the supplies as they arrive by parachute or C130 aircraft.
- Force protection will probably be your greatest concern for the first few days of combat in an area saturated with insurgent forces—you must survive to shoot.
- Expect at least one of the following to occur in the first 24 hours of combat: some key leader will become a casualty; a critical piece of equipment will fail; weather will affect the operation in some unforeseen way; or you'll lose FM communications at a critical time in the fight. Don't forget that the one thing you can count on is Murphy.
- Remember, the enemy has a vote. Expect him to work diligently to unravel your plan.

If units faithfully and systematically "Get Ready—Get Set—Go!" they'll minimize problems and increase their chances for victory. With proper planning, coordinating and rehearsing, the battery commander who calls his battalion S3 will report, "Alpha Battery, ready for action!"

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